

June 9, 2023

Legislative Press Bureau at (401) 528-1743

THIS WEEK AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATE HOUSE — Here are the highlights from news and events that took place in the General Assembly this week. For more information on any of these items visit <http://www.rilegislature.gov/pressrelease>



- **Budget bill advances**

The 2024 state budget bill ([2023-H 5200A](#)), which was approved by the House Finance Committee June 2, is slated to come before the House for consideration Friday. The \$14 billion budget commits funding toward addressing the housing crisis, supports business development and makes education funding more equitable while limiting the use of one-time revenue to one-time expenditures. Following House passage, the bill must also pass the Senate before being sent to the governor. [Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Assembly OKs bill requiring drivers to slow down for nonemergency vehicles**

The General Assembly passed legislation ([2023-S 0088A](#), [2023-H 5294A](#)) introduced by Sen. David P. Tikoian (D-Dist. 22, Smithfield, Lincoln, North Providence) and Rep. Raymond A. Hull (D-Dist. 6 Providence, North Providence) that would require motorists to slow down or leave a buffer lane when nonemergency vehicles are parked on the shoulder of highways. The measure now moves to the governor's office. [Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Lawmakers OK bill to gather information from those who die of overdoses**

The General Assembly passed legislation ([2023-H 5682A](#), [2023-S 0721A](#)) introduced by Rep. Joshua J. Giraldo (D-Dist. 56, Central Falls) and Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) that would allow the collecting of information from overdose deaths to aid in prevention strategies. The legislation would allow the Department of Health to gather information on the circumstances surrounding those deaths to identify prevention and intervention strategies — as long as the relatives of

More...

the deceased are willing to provide the information.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **House OKs ‘Sherry’s Law’ for mandatory jail time for sexual assault**

The House approved legislation ([2023-H 5757aa](#)) sponsored by Rep. Sherry Roberts (R-Dist. 29, West Greenwich, Coventry) to create tougher jail sentences for sexual assault, including a mandatory minimum of 10 years served for first-degree sexual assault and five years served for second-degree. The bill now goes to the Senate. The House amended the bill to name it after Representative Roberts, who came forward with her own painful story of years of abuse by her stepfather when she was a child. Despite her reporting it to police when she was 14, he was not arrested until 2021, then pleaded to a lesser charge to avoid serving any jail time.

- **Senate passes McKenney bill to clarify shoreline access**

The Senate passed legislation ([2023-S 0417A](#)) introduced by Sen. Mark McKenney (D-Dist. 30, Warwick) to establish a more practical and recognizable boundary for the area of the shore to which the public is entitled access. The legislation sets the line at 10 feet landward from the recognizable high tide line, also known as the “wrack line,” recognizable by a line of seaweed, scum and other deposits left where the tide reached its highest point. The measure now moves to the House, which has passed similar legislation ([2023-H 5174](#)) introduced by Rep. Terri Cortvriend (D-Dist. 72, Portsmouth, Middletown).

[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Package of lead-safety bills passes House and Senate**

Four different lead-safety bills passed the House and Senate this week. The bills ([2023-S 0804aa](#), [2023-H 6239A](#), [2023-S 0729aa](#), [2023-H 6238A](#), [2023-S 0739](#), [2023-H 6201](#), [2023-S 0656A](#), [2023-H 5946A](#)) strengthen enforcement of lead-safety laws for tenants by requiring landlords to register their compliance with the state, empower tenants to pay rent into an escrow if landlords are not in compliance with lead-safety laws, allow tenants to seek treble damages if a child is poisoned by a landlords negligence, and close a loophole that excluded some renters. The matching bills now head to the alternate chamber before heading to the governor’s desk.

[Click here to see release on six of the bills.](#)

[Click here to see Acosta release.](#)

[Click here to see Voas release.](#)

- **Senate passes iGaming bill**

The Senate approved legislation ([2023-S 0948A](#)) sponsored by Senate President Dominick J. Ruggeiro (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) to provide a new means of accessing existing table game offerings at Twin River. The bill enables Rhode Islanders over the age of 21 to access existing table games remotely, via a computer or a mobile app. Players would have to be located within the state of Rhode Island. The bill will now be sent to the House for consideration, where Rep. Gregory J. Costantino (D-Dist. 44, Lincoln, Smithfield, Johnston) has introduced similar legislation ([2023-H 6348](#)).

[Click here to see news release](#)

- **House approves phaseout of mercury-containing fluorescent bulbs**

The House approved legislation ([2023-H 5550A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Arthur Handy (D-Dist. 18, Cranston) to phase out the sale of most common fluorescent and compact fluorescent lightbulbs by 2025. While fluorescents were introduced as an energy-efficient step up from incandescent light bulbs, today LEDs are significantly more efficient, much longer lasting, widely available, cost less to own and operate and do not contain toxic mercury, as fluorescents do. The bill now goes to the Senate.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

▪ **Senate passes Kallman bill to increase penalties for wage theft**

The Senate passed a bill ([2023-S 0870aa](#)) sponsored by Sen. Meghan Kallman (D-Dist. 15, Pawtucket, Providence) to toughen penalties for wage theft, the most prevalent and costly form of theft in the United States. The bill would make knowingly and willfully committing wage theft of more than \$1,500 a felony, punishable by fines and incarceration. For willful wage theft of over \$10,000, the penalty could be up to 10 years in prison. These penalties would not apply to employers who make payroll errors in good faith. The bill now heads to the House where Rep. Robert E. Craven (D-Dist. 32, North Kingstown) is sponsoring similar legislation ([2023-H 5902](#)).

[Click here to see news release.](#)

▪ **House OKs bill expanding protections for consumers from energy shutoffs**

The House passed a bill ([2023-H 5411](#)) sponsored by Rep. David Morales (D-Dist. 7, Providence) to expand protections for consumers from energy shutoffs. Under current regulations from the Public Utilities Commission, electricity and gas providers are not permitted to shut off residential utility services during the state's annual utility termination moratorium, which stretches from Nov. 1 to April 15 of each year. The measure now moves to the Senate, where similar legislation ([2023-S 0169](#)) has been introduced by Sen. Melissa A. Murray (D-Dist. 24, Woonsocket, North Smithfield).

[Click here to see news release.](#)

-30-

For an electronic version of this and all press releases published by the Legislative Press and Public Information Bureau, please visit our website at www.rilegislature.gov/pressrelease.